CTS BDS Panel
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How one comes down on the issue of the church passing and implementing BDS resolutions depends on ecclesiology – on what images and scriptural models inform it.

For most of my ministry as a pastor and a member and participant in the Presbyterian Church (USA), I have supported and participated in the image of the church as an advocate and active agent in opposing injustice and struggling to realize the biblical vision of neighbor love expressed in social justice, fairness, equality and compassion. In this issue we are thinking about today - its incredible complexity – I find that I must

reexamine my “going in” assumptions that justice in the Middle East requires one to stand against the policies, practices and actions of the government of Israel in regard to the Palestinian people. The unhappy result is that I find myself disagreeing with and on opposite sides from colleagues, comrades in arms in prior issues of social justice: race, gender, poverty, sexual orientation. It pains me. They are my friends. They represent the kind of church I want to be part of.

I cannot support Divestment particularly, or BDS generally, for a variety of reasons.

1. **The practical**

There is at least a question about the actual effectiveness of divesting. A New York Times

article on March 10, on “the War on Mountain-Top Mining,” concluded that divesting is not particularly effective if the purpose is behavioral change on the part of the business or entity. The article cited a University of Michigan and UCLA study of the anti-apartheid efforts in the 1980s that found real results lacking. The report said: “We find no support for the perception – and often vehement rhetoric in the financial media - that the anti-apartheid shareholders and legislative boycotts affected the financial sector adversely.

As far as I can tell, Divestment from corporations doing business with Israel has two very real and immediate effects.

The corporations mentioned – Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard, Motook – are happy and relieved not to have to deal, at stockholder meetings, with determined and persistent representatives of investor churches. No one argues that the size of our holdings has any material impact on the corporation.

The second effect is that the action deeply offends most, not all, but most American Jews, neighbors with whom we share public space and with whom we frequently join in efforts to serve our communities. Sometimes, I suppose, you have to offend your neighbors in the process of doing what you believe to be right and good. But it ought

to at least slow you down and cause you to reflect and weigh and measure and most of all, listen.

American and Israeli Jews experience boycotts, divestment, and sanction by Christian Churches as:

- attacks on the economy of Israel and thus Israel’s very existence

- confirmation of deeply held feelings of isolation and abandonment and ultimately hostility. It is not as if Jewish people are making it up. The experience of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism that enabled it and that continues to roil beneath the cultures of Europe, the Middle East, and even here, is understandably a profound part of our neighbors’ worldview. In a book of essays,

The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel, University of Chicago Distinguished Professor of Law and Ethics Martha Nussbaum writes:

"I am made uneasy by the single-minded focus on Israel." Given the appalling denial of basic human rights in so many places around the world – China, Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, not to mention the sudden rise of bitterly violent Muslim extremism – "Why?" Professor Nussbaum asks, "the single-minded focus on one small nation on the other side of the world?" (p. 39-40)

I find it distressing that the reality of Israel's security situation and the unabated hostility of the Hamas government of Gaza is almost never even

acknowledged. Nor is the persistent hostility of the government of Iran.

In thinking about this event I did something I had never done before. I read the Hamas Charter, which in no uncertain terms describes the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews as its founding and organizing principle.

It is in the Preamble and throughout:

Article 7 - “The day of judgment will not come until Muslims fight Jews, killing Jews…Jews will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say, O Muslims, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.”

Article 20 could have been lifted from the Protocols of Zion by accusing Jews of “dominating

the media, news agencies, publishing houses and of inspiring the French Revolution, the Communist Revolt, World Wars I & II and the formation of the United Nations."

The Hamas Covenant affirms simply: "Israel will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it."

And, most helpful of all – no negotiated peace settlement –

"Peace initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences are a contradiction to the principle of the Islamic Resistance movement…There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by Jihad."

Curiously, a consensus appears to be emerging – between American Progressives who

are throwing in the towel on a negotiated two-state solution, Hamas – which is committed to a single state – without any Jews in it, and Mr. Netanyahu, who jettisoned his lukewarm commitment to two states in order to win an election.

Meanwhile, Iran – even its new, more moderate leadership has not deviated from Ayatollah Ali Khomeini's statement: "Iran's position is that the cancerous tumor called Israel must be uprooted…the perpetual subject of the Islamic regime is the elimination of Israel."

A recent visitor to the Middle East, one of our editors reported this week his sense that both

Israeli Jews and Palestinians are traumatized people: both feel like victims. Both are victims.

My proposal is that BDS simply deepens the divide and reinforces and hardens opinions on both sides and does nothing to advance either peace or justice.

I began by suggesting that for each of us – ecclesiology is the determining factor here.

The UCC has referred to itself as a "Community of Resistance."

May I suggest, not so much an alternative image, but an additional one – the Church of Jesus Christ as a Repairer of the Breach.

It comes, of course, from shared scripture, the gorgeous 58th chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“If you offer your food to the hungry, satisfy the needs of the afflicted, your light shall rise in the darkness.

- You shall be like a watered garden, your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt,

you shall be called the repairer of the breach

the restorer of streets to live.”

I am part of a group of Presbyterians who are committed to justice for the Palestinian people and security for Israel, who continue to hold onto the goal of two independent, autonomous sates, living side by side in a mutual peace and security, who

believe that building relationships here, where we live, Jews, Muslim, Christian, are at least a sign of peace – and who believe we can and must do better than divestment.